



Director of
Central
Intelligence

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Cuban Government Involvement in Drug Trafficking

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Interagency Intelligence Memorandum

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CUBAN GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN DRUG TRAFFICKING

Information available as of 23 November 1984 was
used in the preparation of this Memorandum.

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
SCOPE NOTE	1
KEY JUDGMENTS	3
DISCUSSION	7
Havana's Involvement in Drug Trafficking	7
Official Support	7
Cuban Motives	8
The Trafficking Network Associated With Cuba	8
<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; width: 100%;"></div>	
Logistics Support to Drug Traffickers	11
Use of Cuban Airspace	11
Use of Cuban Waters and Ports	11
Activity Associated With Cuban-Supported Drug Trafficking	12
Money Laundering	12
Shipments of Embargoed Goods	14
Arms Smuggling	14
The Nicaraguan-Cuban Drug Connection	17
Implications for US Policy	17
<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; width: 100%;"></div>	
.....	21
ANNEX B: Cuban Drug Policy	25
<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; width: 100%;"></div>	
.....	29
ANNEX D: Chronology	31

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SCOPE NOTE

This Memorandum addresses [] Cuban Government involvement in drug trafficking, explores Cuban motives, and discusses the implications for US policy. It represents a joint effort of members of the Intelligence Community, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the US Customs Service, and the US Coast Guard. []

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It is important to bear in mind that Cuban support to drug trafficking has not had a major impact on the total amount of drugs smuggled into the United States annually. Cuban involvement, however, has implications for US drug law-enforcement efforts and policy interests in the Western Hemisphere. []

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KEY JUDGMENTS

Cuba currently is supporting drug trafficking, and we believe that this support will continue during the next few years. Although Havana is sensitive to US evidence of Cuban involvement in drug trafficking, it realizes it can benefit from continued participation in the drug trade as long as it can plausibly deny its support. Furthermore, drug traffickers, faced with improving enforcement efforts and growing competition from other emerging trafficking groups, probably will continue to seek assistance from Cuba. []

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We judge that Fidel Castro is fully cognizant of and condones the drug-related activity that is taking place with the support of Cuban officials, despite Havana's puritanical stance on drug use and its official condemnation of traffickers. []

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The key Cuban participants in drug trafficking are officers of the Interior Ministry or of the America Department of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee who are responsible for intelligence activities and for promoting subversive activities in Latin America. Their participation strongly indicates a sanctioned government policy, rather than an arrangement for personal gain. []

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We believe that Havana's objectives for supporting the drug trade are to promote Cuban subversive activities and political goals, to earn hard currency, and to obtain embargoed goods. []

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Cuban involvement in drug trafficking may help to promote Cuban political objectives in the Western Hemisphere. Cuban intelligence officers have developed links to drug traffickers that enable them to promote intelligence operations and subversive activities. A Cuban-supported drug trafficker may have already provided financial backing for General Directorate for Intelligence political action goals in the United States. The effectiveness of gunrunners and professional smugglers in supplying arms to the Sandinistas in 1979 apparently persuaded Havana that such connections would be useful in its efforts to arm other insurgent and terrorist groups. It is likely that Cuba will continue to use established smuggling networks to transport arms to subversive organizations, and this will enable Cuba to support their operations in the region while maintaining plausible denial. Also, Havana probably is counting on continuing to receive hard currency from drug traffickers, some of which could help to finance subversive activities. []

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To minimize the risk of exposure, Havana probably will continue to deal with selected drug traffickers who are less likely to be apprehended and who have at their disposal resources and international connections that Cuba can use to serve its interests.

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We believe that Cuban involvement in trafficking drugs to the United States has resulted in serious implications for US drug law enforcement and foreign policy. For example, recent evidence of Nicaraguan Government involvement in the drug trade indicated a strong Cuban connection. Other countries in the region could be similarly influenced.

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Cuban support to drug trafficking probably will make US-sponsored drug-interdiction efforts in Latin America more difficult, but will not significantly increase the number of vessels or aircraft carrying drugs to the United States because Cuba will continue to support only selected traffickers. The sanctuary that Cuba provides to drug traffickers complicates drug-enforcement efforts in the Caribbean:

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— Vessels carrying drugs from South America to the United States frequently use Cuban waters to avoid interdiction, with and without official Cuban sanction. Cuba has allowed selected drug-trafficking vessels safe harbor in Cuban ports. We are aware of suspect vessels that have transited Cuban waters since 1976. This use of Cuban waters as a safehaven continues to be a problem for US interdiction efforts.

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— Available evidence indicates that Cuba is used as a transshipment point for some Colombian drugs bound for the United States in an effort to circumvent US maritime drug-interdiction efforts.

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Despite Cuba's strict drug laws, Havana probably will continue to adapt its drug policy to suit its purposes. Although Havana will continue to reiterate its record of stringent domestic drug control and occasionally arrest drug traffickers entering its waters and airspace, we judge it highly unlikely that Havana will cooperate with international drug-interdiction efforts. []

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We believe that Havana will remain sensitive to international accounts of its involvement in drug trafficking. Additional public pressure, which exposes Havana's direct links to the drug trade, will help to contain Cuban involvement, but it is unlikely that such publicity will deter it significantly. Havana will continue to rely on plausible denial to negate the effect of US accusations while taking greater pains to mask its activities. []

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DISCUSSION

Havana's Involvement in Drug Trafficking

Official Support

1. Traditionally, Havana has taken a puritanical stance on drug abuse, claiming it is symptomatic of moral weakness and capitalistic decadence. Since the late 1970s, however, the Cubans have developed a dual approach to illicit drug traffic: it is still condemned in theory and suppressed within Cuba, but it is condoned in certain circumstances where it can be used to further Cuban goals. Despite official government condemnation of drug trafficking, [redacted]

[redacted] high-level Cuban officials are aiding selected traffickers engaged in shipping drugs to the United States. The degree of involvement of these officials, the coordination their activities require, and the monolithic nature of the Cuban power structure strongly suggest that their drug-related activities are based on sanctioned government policy rather than personal arrangements with traffickers. We believe that Fidel Castro is fully cognizant of and condones the drug-related activity that is taking place with the support of Cuban officials. [redacted]

2. Information concerning drug trafficking by Jaime Guillot Lara ¹ during 1980 and 1981 clearly documents the high degree of coordination within the Cuban hierarchy regarding drug trafficking. [redacted]

¹ For more information on this case, see annex D, page 32. [redacted]

5. Cuban Embassy officials and intelligence officers also reportedly have facilitated drug trafficking. Officials of the Cuban Embassies in Bogota and Mexico City are believed to have assisted Guillot. [redacted]

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ment, and the overall incentive for drug profits that is brought about by capitalistic ideology. [REDACTED]

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The Trafficking Network Associated With Cuba

10. The MININT oversees drug operations in Cuba, at times providing support to traffickers [REDACTED]

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Cuban Motives

6. We believe that Havana's objectives for supporting the drug trade are to promote Cuban subversive activities and political goals, to earn hard currency, and to obtain embargoed goods. This judgment is based on the fact that the key Cuban officials involved in facilitating trafficking are officers of the MININT or of the America Department of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee who are responsible for intelligence activities and for promoting subversive activities in Latin America.⁸ [REDACTED]

7. Havana may perceive support to drug traffickers as a way to take advantage of the growing US market for illicit drugs to obtain hard currency. Although we have been unable to quantify the amount of money Cuba derives from supporting drug trafficking, we do not believe it does much to mitigate Cuba's serious economic problems, if indeed that is their intent. Instead, these revenues might be used to create slush funds for intelligence operations or subversive activities. [REDACTED]

8. [REDACTED] an important Cuban motive for supporting drug trafficking in one major case was to facilitate arms shipments to insurgent and terrorist groups. Following the fallout from the Guillot case, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Cuban involvement was not primarily intended to facilitate drug trafficking, but to use the established Colombian drug-smuggling networks to supply the M-19 terrorist group. At that time, the Cubans apparently figured that trafficking in drugs was simply a cost incurred as part of the arms trade. [REDACTED]

9. Havana may attempt to aggravate the US drug problem to embarrass and corrupt the United States; however, we have no reliable evidence that indicates Cuban involvement is intended to demoralize US society. Cuba does make use of the US drug problem in its propaganda against the US Government. The major themes in Cuban commentaries are the duplicity in US drug policy, corruption in US law enforce-

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cross Cuba probably originate and terminate in Jamaica. Frequently, they drop their cargo to vessels waiting in The Bahamas. The Cubans realize that these aircraft are involved in illicit activity because the frequent, nonstop, round trip flights are made without filing flight plans with air traffic control authorities.⁵ We are not aware of any effective effort by Havana to prevent such flights, although it has the right to do so.⁶

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13. The supply of drugs flowing from South America is virtually controlled by several groups of major Colombian traffickers, including Carlos Enrique Lehder Rivas, who has supplied cocaine to the *known drug trafficker* that facilitates Cuba's drug deals. Lehder, who is under US indictment for cocaine-trafficking and drug-conspiracy charges, is believed to be one of the largest suppliers of cocaine to the United States.

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Use of Cuban Waters and Ports

19. The US Coast Guard has documented several instances of suspect vessels traveling right at the edge of Cuban territorial waters in the three-mile-wide "buffer zone" that pursuing US Coast Guard cutters are prohibited from entering. We are aware of

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⁵ See annex B, page 26, for further explanation of Havana's policy regarding these flights.

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Logistics Support to Drug Traffickers

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drug traffickers fly regularly through Cuban airspace and that vessels carrying drugs from South America to the United States frequently use Cuban waters to avoid interdiction.

Use of Cuban Airspace

16. The two Cuban air corridors are part of the international airways system used daily by commercial and private aircraft. Some drug traffickers use these airways because they offer a shorter, safer route to their destinations, thereby enabling their aircraft to carry more drugs and to avoid air-interdiction efforts. Other drug traffickers, however, choose to avoid Cuban airspace rather than risk detection by Cuban authorities. We believe that most drug flights that

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[] vessels that have transited Cuban waters since 1976. This use of Cuban waters as a safehaven continues to be a problem for US interdiction efforts. []

works to transport arms and supplies to subversive groups in Latin America. []

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Money Laundering

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20. On occasion, drug-trafficking vessels enter Cuban waters and are seized by Cuban patrol boats. Most of these vessels are towed to Cuban ports where their crews are detained pending a decision by Havana to jail or release them. Although []

[] Cuba may be willing to accept money to release seized drug-trafficking vessels, enabling them to deliver their loads to the United States, we believe that bribes may be accepted infrequently by low-level Cuban officials; Havana is probably unaware of these arrangements. Most likely, Havana would deal only with selected drug traffickers whose vessels would be allowed to use Cuban waters only when arrangements were made prior to drug shipments. []

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Activity Associated With Cuban-Supported Drug Trafficking

23. Cuba has in the past and may continue to assist selected traffickers by laundering drug profits. In return for Cuban support, drug traffickers may provide Cuba with embargoed goods from the United States and may use their smuggling vessels and net-

27. In most drug-money-laundering operations, a financier acts as an intermediary between the drug dealers and the commercial bank. This financier usually is experienced in international money flows and works with only a few trusted individuals. []

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33. We believe that the Cubans probably will continue to use traffickers to smuggle weapons to subver-

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sive groups. In addition, it also is conceivable that a portion of the hard currency that Cuba obtains from facilitating drug trafficking also may be used to fund Cuban purchases of munitions and equipment for these groups.

The Nicaraguan-Cuban Drug Connection

34. [] high-level officials of the Nicaraguan Government approved a plan to assist traffickers moving drugs between South America and the United States. Managua had hoped to realize a profit in hard currency []

bases of operation in Panama and Nicaragua [] indicates that some major Colombian traffickers have established cocaine labs in Nicaragua []

[] This development has the potential to make Nicaragua a significant producer of cocaine hydrochloride in addition to its drug-transit role. []

Implications for US Policy

38. We believe that Havana's continued support to selected drug traffickers will complicate US drug-enforcement policy. Although Havana is sensitive to US evidence of Cuban involvement in drug trafficking, it realizes it can benefit from continued participation in the drug trade as long as it can plausibly deny its support. Furthermore, drug traffickers, faced with improving enforcement efforts and growing competition from other emerging trafficking groups, probably will continue to seek assistance from Cuba. []

39. It is likely that Havana will take advantage of continued involvement in drug trafficking to promote Cuban subversive activities and political goals, to earn hard currency, and to obtain embargoed goods. To minimize the risk of exposure, Havana probably will prefer to deal with selected drug traffickers who are less likely to be apprehended and who have enormous amounts of resources and international connections that Cuba can use to serve its interests. We see little reason why traffickers will hesitate to comply with Havana's requirements. []

40. We believe that Cuban involvement in drug trafficking may help to promote Cuban political objectives in the Western Hemisphere. Cuban intelligence officers have developed links to drug traffickers, which enable them to promote intelligence operations and subversive activities. A Cuban-supported drug trafficker may have already provided financial backing for DGI political action goals in the United States. The effectiveness of gunrunners and professional smugglers in supplying arms to the Sandinistas in 1979 apparently persuaded Havana that such connections would be useful in its efforts to arm other insurgent and terrorist groups. It is likely that Cuba will continue to use smuggling networks to transport arms to subversive organizations, and this will enable it to []

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support their operations in the region while maintaining plausible denial. Also, Havana is probably counting on continuing to receive hard currency from drug traffickers, some of which could help to finance subversive activities. []

41. We believe that Havana will remain sensitive to international accounts of its involvement in drug trafficking. Additional public pressure, which exposes Havana's direct links to the drug trade, will help to contain Cuban involvement, but it is unlikely that such publicity will deter it significantly. Havana will continue to rely on plausible denial to negate the effect of US accusations while taking greater pains to mask its activities. []

42. Despite Cuba's strict drug laws, Havana probably will continue to adapt its drug policy to suit its purposes. Although Havana will continue to reiterate its record of stringent domestic drug control and occasionally arrest drug traffickers entering its waters and airspace, we judge it highly unlikely that Havana will cooperate with international drug-interdiction efforts.¹¹ []

43. We believe that Cuban support to drug trafficking will make US-sponsored drug-interdiction efforts in Latin America more difficult, but will not significantly increase the number of vessels or aircraft carrying drugs to the United States because Cuba will continue to support only selected traffickers. The sanctuary that Cuba provides to drug traffickers com-

¹¹ Annex B discusses Cuban drug policy and provides additional insight into prospects for Cuban cooperation with US efforts to curb the drug trade. []

plicates drug-enforcement efforts in the Caribbean: []

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- Drug traffickers can use Cuban waters and airspace as a buffer zone to avoid US interdiction efforts in the Windward Passage and the Yucatan Channel.

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- Cuban-supported drug traffickers have access to a variety of sophisticated methods of shipping drugs, such as expensive yachts or executive jets, which do not match the profile of a traditional suspect smuggler.

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- Traffickers can refuel their vessels and aircraft in Cuba, enabling them to travel farther north beyond the traditional offloading sites in the United States.

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44. We believe that Cuban involvement in trafficking drugs to the United States has resulted in serious implications for US drug law enforcement and foreign policy. For example, recent evidence of Nicaraguan Government involvement in the drug trade indicated a strong Cuban connection. Other countries in the region could be similarly influenced. []

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ANNEX B

Cuban Drug Policy

1. Havana views the domestic use of illicit drugs as an ideological, unacceptable moral weakness. Cuba has a repressive enforcement system aimed at violations of its strict drug laws and maintains that it does not have a significant domestic drug problem. Although Cuba's domestic drug policy appears rigid, Havana has been known to bend the rules to suit its purposes. [REDACTED]

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Domestic Drug Policy

2. Illicit drugs do not constitute a major domestic law enforcement problem for the Cuban police. The authorities, for example, have made no effort to marshal public opinion against illegal drug use, a standard tactic used to counter other types of "antisocial behavior." Lack of evidence is not a problem with prosecution in most drug cases. Jail sentences are usually stiff, ranging from three to 20 years for drug-related offenses. At the same time, it is clear that drugs are available to those Cubans who have the money and the appropriate contacts, and there have been cases in which the Cuban courts have passed more lenient sentences. [REDACTED]

3. **Cuban Drug Seizures.** The Cuban Border Guard routinely discovers floating marijuana bales which they turn over to the National Revolutionary Police for incineration. Additionally, Cuban authorities seize drugs on board international vessels or aircraft that are forced to land in Cuba for reasons such as mechanical problems, navigational error, or adverse weather. [REDACTED]

4. **Cuban Drug Cultivation and Production.**

There have been isolated reports of small-scale marijuana cultivation by Cuban farmers since the mid-1970s. The only report of Cuban Government-sanctioned cultivation came during the May 1983 testimony before a Congressional panel in Miami. Mario Esteves Gonzales, a Cuban arrested for marijuana trafficking who claims to have been a Cuban intelligence agent, said that marijuana was grown by the DGI at two locations in Cuba during 1977-78. [REDACTED]

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5. There have also been [REDACTED] reports of cocaine laboratories in Cuba and of unrefined coca being flown from South America to Cuba for further processing. Additionally, large quantities of ether were shipped from Mexico to Cuba in November 1983. Available information does not indicate whether this ether was used for the processing of cocaine or for legitimate industrial purposes. [REDACTED]

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Drug Policy Regarding Foreigners

6. Foreigners are occasionally arrested by the Cubans on drug-trafficking charges. Some of these, even though innocent, have been jailed simply on the suspicion that they were transporting illicit cargoes. It appears that the Cubans are harder on American suspects than those of other nationalities. For example, in May 1983, Cuban authorities arrested three foreigners and charged them with illegal entry and drug trafficking. The two Americans were detained, while the Japanese woman who accompanied them was released and expelled from Cuba. [REDACTED]

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7. Most of the American prisoners who were released from Cuban prison in June 1984 during a US presidential aspirant's visit were arrested on drug-trafficking charges. Prior to this, Cuba had stopped turning over the custody of US citizens to the US Interests Section, apparently out of the growing tension that evolved from US allegations of Cuban support to drug traffickers. There has been one unconfirmed report that an American drug trafficker was released from a Cuban prison because relatives paid a \$2 million ransom to the Cubans. We do not believe that this is a common practice of the Cuban Government. []

8. In late 1983, Havana initiated the only dialogue with the US Government on a drug-related issue since the Guillot case. According to the Cubans, their military officials had detected an unprecedented number of unidentified aircraft, suspected of being used by drug traffickers, on flights through their air corridors to and from the United States. Havana requested that the US Government take all possible measures to warn pilots of small aircraft to avoid Cuban airspace violations. []

9. [] since these planes are likely to be piloted by drug traffickers, as the Cubans acknowledged, the United States would be unable to force them to comply with Cuban regulations. Also, there was no mention of any effort on the part of the Cubans to identify or communicate with the aircraft in question. []

[] The timing of the original Cuban diplomatic note leads us to believe that it was not intended as an initiative for joint policy to stop the flights but rather as a tactic to appear concerned or cooperative about drug trafficking in preparation for a US Congressional visit. []

Reactions to US Allegations

10. Havana continues to strongly deny US charges of its involvement in drug trafficking, although Cuban press reports suggest that the US threat to Cuba would justify such involvement. Cuban commentaries often focus on the US drug problem, in order to convince the Cuban people that the growing use of drugs is another facet of the decadence of the American way of life. []

11. *Impact of the Guillot Case.* The Cuban Government was not seriously harmed by the revelations made in the Guillot case because it was able to plausibly deny its involvement by claiming it had no knowledge of Guillot's activity and later admitting to having dealt with him only to provide support for Colombian guerrillas. Havana also was able to hide behind its record of stringent domestic drug control and occasional cooperation with US enforcement efforts. At the same time the Cuban Embassy in Mexico was attempting to secure Guillot's release, the Cuban press called on the United States to produce evidence of the alleged involvement of Cuban officials, assuring the Cuban people that the trial was ludicrous, fraudulent, and based on the flimsy testimony of Cuban-born traffickers residing in the United States. []

12. *Indictment of Cuban Officials.* In November 1982, based on evidence presented in the Guillot case, a US district court indicted four Cuban officials: Rene Rodriguez Cruz, ICAP President; Fernando Ravelo Renedo, former Cuban Ambassador to Colombia; Gonzalo Bassols Suarez, Cuban Communist Party official; and Vice Adm. Aldo Santamaria Cuadrado, then Vice Minister and Chief of the Cuban Navy. Following the indictments, Cuba protested in an official memo to the US Interests Section couched in shrill, undiplomatic language and replete with unfounded charges against US officials and institutions. Most of the memo was reprinted in a massive front page editorial in the Cuban Communist Party newspaper. Of those indicted: []

— Rodriguez remains in his position as the President of ICAP. []

— Ravelo called the charges infamy and claimed that serving as godfather to a Colombian drug trafficker's daughter was part of his diplomatic duty. He also stated that support to the M-19 was consistent with the Cuban sympathy for revolutionary causes abroad. Ravelo's career does not appear to have been affected by the indictment. In March 1984, he was identified in the Cuban press as the deputy chief responsible for Central American affairs for the America Department of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC/AD). []

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- Bassols, also a high-ranking official of the PCC/AD, probably was not hurt by the indictment.

[redacted]

- Santamaria no longer holds the position of vice minister and chief of the Cuban Navy, but we do not believe his dismissal was connected in any way with the indictment. He maintained his official capacity as Commander of the Cuban Revolutionary Navy in public appearances until June 1984 when he was replaced, probably because of his age and failing eyesight. He now serves on the Cuban Defense Council.

[redacted]

[redacted]

14. **Termination of the Agreement To Cooperate.** In January 1978, the US and Cuban Governments

met to discuss the possibility of joint initiatives on drug control. The Cubans expressed a willingness to cooperate with the US Coast Guard both in the exchange of information and in conducting parallel enforcement efforts to stem the flow of drugs north. Cuban officials expressed total aversion to drug trafficking, which in part reflected their concern that Cuban exile drug traffickers may have been helping to finance anti-Cuban political/terrorist activities.

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15. Havana announced its termination of this agreement in November 1982 following the indictment of the Cuban officials. According to the US Coast Guard, this cooperation effectively ended in the summer of 1980 with the Mariel Boatlift, which coincided with the initial arrangement that the Cubans made to assist Guillot. The Cubans may have believed the termination of this agreement would be a domestic embarrassment for the US Government.

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16. **Rhetorical Backlash.** Since January 1984, the Cuban media have intensified efforts to discredit life in the United States partly in an apparent attempt to prepare Cubans for broadcasts by US Radio Marti. Recent commentaries in *Granma*, the official party organ, have commented on the US drug problem in a counterattack against US allegations of Cuban involvement in drug trafficking.

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June 1980: According to Juan Lazaro "Johnny" Crump, a Colombian drug trafficker and informant in the Jaime Guillot Lara investigation, he was contacted by Cuban officials who had approved a plan to refuel his drug-trafficking aircraft in Camaguey, Cuba. []

August 1980: Various reliable sources reported that Guillot began his trafficking activities under official Cuban protection during the summer of 1980. Under his arrangement with Cuban officials, vessels loaded with drugs traveled from Colombia to Cuban waters, where they transferred their loads to smaller boats and then docked at a Cuban port. Crump indicated that during 1980-81 Guillot's vessels made monthly shipments to the United States. A total of 2.5 million pounds of marijuana, 25 million methaqualone tablets, and 80 pounds of cocaine were documented as having been sent to the United States by Guillot from 1979-81. In return for using Cuban ports as a safehaven, Guillot reportedly was charged between \$500,000 and \$800,000 per stop in Cuba. Because most of his drug shipments were seized by US authorities, by October 1981, Guillot owed the Cuban Government \$8 million. Also on Cuba's behalf, Guillot purchased weapons and used his smuggling networks to ship them to the Colombian terrorist group, the M-19. One of his vessels, the Karina, carrying weapons for the terrorists, was sunk by the Colombian Navy in November 1981. There has been substantial testimony and other evidence verifying this information. []

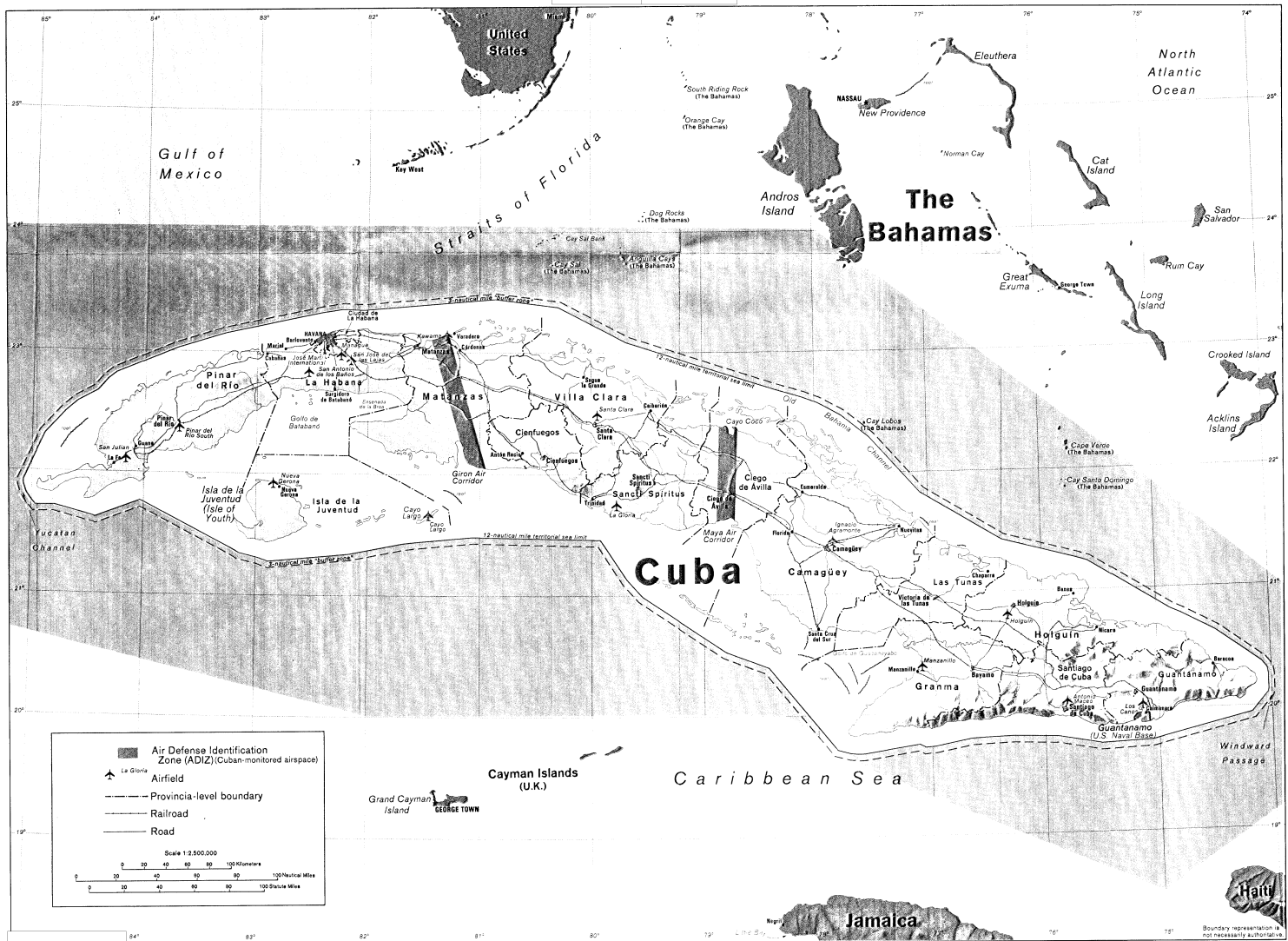
November 1980: Mario Esteves Gonzalez, a Cuban arrested in Florida in November 1981, testified that he had been attached to the Guillot operation in late 1980 and assisted in the offloading of drugs from mother ships receiving safe harbor in Cuban ports. Esteves claims to be a trained Cuban intelligence agent who came to the United States during the Mariel Boatlift and that his chief mission in Florida was the distribution of illicit drugs. He allegedly returned \$5 million in drug profits to the Cubans. []

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